

NEWS RELEASE

Nebraska Department of Natural Resources

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DNR Director Announces Purchase of Surface Water in Republican Basin for 2007

(Lincoln, Neb.) Ann Bleed, Director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced that after several months of negotiation, an agreement has been signed between the Republican River Basin Coalition, the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation, and several irrigation districts in the basin to purchase the use of this year's irrigation water supply.

The 2007 water available for diversion by the Frenchman Valley, Riverside and Frenchman-Cambridge Irrigation Districts, which totals 36,000 acre feet of water, will not be diverted for use by local irrigators, but instead will be sent downstream as part of the state's efforts to comply with the 2001 Republican River Compact settlement.

When combined with the surface water already purchased from Nebraska's Bostwick Irrigation District, more than 54,000 acre feet of water will be used to help reduce Nebraska's consumptive water use this year and provide water to Kansas. The first release of water from the Harlan County Dam for Kansas was scheduled to occur June 21st.

"I want to express my thanks to all the Natural Resources Districts and irrigation districts that have come to the table this year," said Governor Dave Heineman. "These agreements are a significant step in helping our state meet our consumptive use targets for the year. We still have a number of challenges to address, but today's announcement is key in getting Nebraska on the right track and the rainfall the basin has received so far this summer will also go a long way towards helping producers. I want to thank the NRDs in the region for their hard work in laying the groundwork that led to these agreements."

"The release of this surface water is intended to deliver water to Kansas, so that Nebraska can honor its obligations. These leases were made possible by LB 701, which was the result of much cooperation between NRDs, irrigation districts, and state lawmakers. By forging this legislation and these surface water leases, we were able to avoid severe allocation reductions and unnecessary economic devastation," said Jasper Fanning, manager of the Upper Republican Natural Resources District and member of the Republican River Basin Coalition, which was formed to implement the water purchase. The coalition consists of the Upper Republican, Middle Republican and Lower Republican Natural Resources Districts (NRDs).

Mike Ryan, Great Plains Regional Director for the Bureau of Reclamation, said, "We are pleased this agreement helps Nebraska move forward in meeting its water obligations while protecting the interests of Reclamation's surface irrigation projects."

"An important step achieved with the water buyout is to bring surface water users to the negotiating table and show the role they need to play in managing streamflows," said Steve Henry, a board member of the Frenchman-Cambridge Irrigation District.

Ann Bleed, Director of the Department of Natural Resources said, "This purchase helps Nebraska comply with the Republican River Compact by reducing our consumptive use of water, while ensuring that more water flows past gages set out for compact accounting purposes."